Then Came the Morning

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Then Came the Morning

by A_Canceled_Stamp

Summary

Tim flees from the Manor after a fight with Bruce and goes to one of Jason's safe houses, expecting it to be deserted.

It is. But only for a short while.

Or;

Jason walks in on Tim Drake having a panic attack in his kitchen. Chaos ensues.

Notes

I crawl out from underneath a pile of unfinished essays and WIP's to shove this monstrosity down your throats before hastily returning to the shadows where I belong.

CONTENT WARNING: detailed description of a panic attack. Take care of yourselves, babes.

See the end of the work for more notes

Tim's shoes squelched against the pavement, the pitter-patter of rain on his hood ringing in his ears. His shadow moved across the wall as he passed under a flickering streetlight before it slid to the ground and grew long in front of him. A car rumbled past him on the deserted street. The cracked, red glow from the tail lights blurred in the downpour before the car turned a corner and disappeared out of view.

The cold hadn't been so bad at first. It was almost like a distraction; the icy wind that bit at his nose and ears grounding him, his aching fingers tethering him to the present.

But after more than an hour of walking through a storm in the middle of November, Tim couldn't help but admit that it had started to become more of a problem than anything else.

His feet were completely numb, waves of pins and needles shooting across the soles with every step. The hood had long since given up on offering him any form of protection, instead allowing a steady stream of water to run down the back of his neck.

Another gust of wind blew past him, and Tim wrapped his thin jacket closer around himself, twisting his body to shield himself from the wall of rain that blew into his face. He was shivering so badly that his teeth chattered, his fingers frozen even after he'd hidden them in his armpits.

And the feeling was *still fucking there*.

It was a sensation of fire and ice that flared down to his stomach with every hitching breath. It was pent-up frustrations and emotions and fears blocked off behind a deteriorating dam only moments away from collapsing.

And it hadn't wavered once since leaving the Manor an hour or so ago. In fact, it only seemed to have gotten *worse*.

I'm not angry, Tim. I'm just disappointed.

Tim kept his gaze down as he walked, watching his legs move underneath him without really feeling them. His heart beat a staccato

in his chest and the rain still refused to let up. It rather felt like its intensity was *increasing*.

A stream of water ran alongside the pavement, flooding large parts of the sidewalk where its edge dipped too low. The neon lights from a nearby deli shop reflected on the wet ground, the image rippling on the rain-disrupted surface. In the distance, a pair of dogs barked furiously at each other, the sound almost drowned out by the downpour.

The noises were deafening and everywhere and surrounding him and *suffocating* and Tim's brain just wouldn't *shut up*. His eyes were starting to burn, and his throat felt like it was swelling shut, aching with every hitched breath.

Fuck. *Fuck*. He couldn't do this. He needed to get out of this fucking rain, needed the smells and noises to just *stop* so that he could fucking think for one goddamned second—

He hadn't meant to stay up so late. Anxiety and self-doubts along with too many Red Bulls had made sleep an impossibility. It had left both his brain and heart racing, his body overflowing with an energy he was too exhausted to get rid of.

The only way he had been able to somewhat soothe his overheating mind had been to organize his photos, giving him at least *something* that he felt he had control over, the only thing he could manage and regulate without anyone else telling him otherwise.

Having forgotten his own computer at work, he'd headed down to the Batcave, finding it easier to sort through his pictures on the bigger screen. Bruce was to be back within the hour, but Tim, remembering the promise of "respecting one's sleep schedules" he made to the man the evening prior, had planned on being gone by then. No one would've been none the wiser.

But then he had lost track of time.

The sudden sound of the Batmobile tearing through the cave had caused a colony of bats to scatter from their resting place high up in the ceiling, and had sent a wave of panic through Tim's heart.

Bruce had looked so angry. Like, eye-twitching, jaw-clenchingly angry. Which in turn had made *Tim* angry. And also feel a little bit like crying. That specific feeling intensified as their voices echoed through the cave, as dread started to build in his stomach, the feeling

of himself losing control over the situation overwhelming him.

He'd been so tired, seconds away from curling up in the chair he was sitting in and going to sleep right then and there. He'd wanted everything to stop. He'd wanted Bruce to shut up and *go away* because he was pretty sure his head was going to *explode* if he didn't.

Then Bruce's gaze had flickered to the screens of the Batcomputer. His lips had thinned, his brow furrowing as he crossed his arms over the bat symbol on his chest. And his voice had sounded *cold* when he looked Tim square in the eye and ordered him to give him his camera.

Tim had felt like the air had been knocked out of his lungs. And suddenly, he hadn't been standing in front of Bruce anymore.

Jack Drake's arms were crossed over his chest, his face twisting into a scowl as he took in the camera in Tim's hand, the open window of his room. "You need to get ahold of yourself. This is not how a Drake behaves."

Tim's nails dug into his arms, making his eyes burn. Or maybe they already were.

Jack moved quicker than Tim had expected; one moment he was standing still, and the next he'd torn Tim's camera out of his hands.

"No, don't, please—"

"Don't whine," Jack hissed. "As long as you live under my roof your actions will have consequences. Starting with this."

The sound of shattering glass as the camera collided with the floor echoed between the walls of Drake Manor.

"You, Tim Drake, are a disappointment to the family name."

"Tim." Bruce's voice was sharp as glass, pulling Tim from the memory. His hand was now outstretched, palm facing the ceiling.

Tim's mouth was bone dry. "Bruce, I—"

"Now."

Handing the camera over had felt like drowning. Like having Robin taken from him all over again.

He'd just taken Alfred's portrait. Hadn't had the time to move them to his hard drive yet.

The echo of a camera lens shattering echoed in his mind.

Bruce had looked at him then, really *looked* at him, and something in his expression changed. He had sighed, cradling the camera in his hands, suddenly looking as tired as Tim felt. "Tim, I promise I'm not angry. I'm just…disappointed."

Tim had stiffened and gone strangely cold, as if a bucket of freezing water had been thrown over him. And after that things became a bit… fuzzy.

He must've stormed out because the next moment he was walking down the street and his jacket was soaked and his ears were freezing, and he hadn't known where he was or where he was heading.

But it didn't matter.

No, the only thing that mattered was going someplace where he could finally be alone and finally do something to force his brain to stop making so much *noise*. And if that meant getting as far away from Bruce as possible, then so be it.

It hadn't taken long, however, before it'd dawned on him that he, in fact, didn't have anywhere to go.

Dick was on a mission in Blüdhaven. Stephanie was hanging out with Cass on the other side of town, and she probably wouldn't have appreciated being cock-blocked by a mental breakdown from someone who hadn't spoken to her in days. Or maybe even weeks at this point.

He didn't even have his own apartment anymore. Mainly because he was the genius who had finally accepted Bruce's long-standing offer and officially move to the Manor. To sell his apartment. To give up the only place he could find solace on a night like this.

Needless to say, Tim Drake was a fucking idiot.

But Bruce had seemed so sure, and the blinding smile and crushing hug he'd given Tim when he'd finally accepted the key to the Manor had made him feel like his worries had been for nothing.

Tim should've known. He should've *known* it wasn't going to last. These things never did.

At the time, the manor had been more than a five mile's walk away. Even if Tim wanted to go back, which he really, *really* hadn't, his legs were already too numb to be able to carry him there. And there was no way he could call Bruce, mainly because he'd forgotten his phone at the Manor. Which had left him with only one other option.

So, with a minute's hesitation under the roof of a doorstep, he'd turned a corner and changed his course toward Crime Alley.

Now, half an hour later, he stumbled past the Deli, turning left into the familiar alleyway on instinct. He spotted one of the marked dumpsters that lined the brick wall, silently confirming to himself that this was the right place.

The thought that it had been *him* marking the dumpster felt absurd. Him sneaking through the alleyways of Crime Alley, marking dumpsters and brick walls under apartment complexes felt like another life *entirely*. When he'd still worn the yellow *'R'* on his chest with pride. When they were in the process of mapping out a new vigilante's safe houses.

Back when they didn't know who *The Red Hood* was.

Tim's steps faltered as he approached the fire escape. The smell of week-old garbage was sour in his nose, and he breathed through his mouth to quell the nausea that was building in his gut.

Things between him and Jason weren't…good. Tim didn't know if they ever *could* be. There was too much conflict, too much pain between them. Too many bad memories associated with *the Red Hood* to ever be able to discern him from *Jason Todd*. Tim didn't have the strength to forgive him. Not yet.

A part of him wondered if that frustrated the rest of the bats. If they rolled their eyes at Tim's reluctance to pretend that Jason hadn't done or hadn't said the things he had. Or if they were talking about Tim behind his back, much like what he'd just until recently realized his father had done.

He's usually more reasonable than this.

He'll come around.

He won't stay mad forever.

But Tim couldn't trust their judgment. He didn't have the same

connection to the Jason as the others did. He didn't have any good memories from his childhood (outside of sneaking pictures of Robin trailing the Bat in the middle of the night) that could somehow counterweight the bad ones. And there were a lot of really, *really* bad ones.

However, it hadn't been until recent weeks that, despite his many attempts to discard the notion altogether, Tim had almost started to...*understand* the vigilante. Or at least where his actions had been coming from.

The pain of being replaced had not resonated with him before, had been something that he'd very nearly scoffed at, not finding it a good enough reason to embark on something as extensive as a mad quest for revenge. To attack someone who really didn't deserve it.

But after losing Robin, after having the identity *torn* from him and given to Damian—

With the newfound resentment he felt toward the new Robin, as well as the core-deep feeling of betrayal that seemed adamant in accompanying him even months after the ordeal had taken place… well, he couldn't imagine how it would feel for a traumatized, Pit-influenced teenager.

It didn't change the fact that he still didn't actually *know* Jason – as a person – outside of the mask.

But the really fucked-up thing was that some part of Tim – the child inside him, he presumed, still only seeing Robin where he should be seeing a murderer – *wanted* to. Wanted to get to know the man, to understand how the people from Jason's past were so willing to look past the *killing people* part and still welcome the man back with open arms.

There was just one slight problem.

Jason didn't like him.

Ever since reuniting with Bruce, Jason had kept well away from Tim. It seemed like he was making an *effort* to make himself scarce whenever Tim stopped by at the Manor, or whenever they crossed paths as their alter egos. As if the older man couldn't stand to be around him. And for some strange reason, it hurt. It made Tim angry. If anything, it was *Tim* who should be avoiding *Jason*. Not the other way around.

But then he would think of Damian and Dick and the anger was replaced by bitter understanding.

Tim sucked in a harsh breath, opening eyes he didn't remember closing. The building loomed over him, tarry black sky hailing rain down at him, feeling more like shards of ice as they landed on his cheeks. The hood of his jacket had fallen back at his shifted perspective, but he didn't have the will to pull it up again.

At the end of the day, none of his quarrels with Jason mattered at the moment; the man wouldn't even be here. Tim had overheard him and Dick talking over the comms about a supposed drug deal going down in Blüdhaven this weekend. Gotham, and thus the safe house, would remain Hood-free for another few days at the least.

Tim was lucky that was the case. Because his time was running out.

It was like the overwhelming feeling moments before vomiting; the spurt of cold sweat, the moment of clarity and adrenaline that's granted for the sole purpose of getting the fuck out of dodge and finding the closest trashcan.

If Tim didn't find somewhere quiet, somewhere where he could just sit down and close his eyes and wait for everything to *stop*, the dam was going to crack and crumble, and he would drown under the weight of the water crashing down on him.

He wasn't going to allow himself to have a full-blown panic attack in a filthy alleyway in Crime Alley. No fucking way.

The thought was what granted him enough grit to jump up and grab the bottom ladder. It drove him to hold onto the slippery step even as his frozen fingers slipped and screamed in pain, and forced him to pull himself up each bar with trembling arms until he'd made it far enough to place his feet on the bottom step and climb up to the first platform.

As he stumbled up the metal stairs, he could hear disembodied voices within the apartment complexes. A couple screaming at each other on the first floor. Another one having very, *very* loud sex on the second. The blaring sound of a game show program playing on the third. What people were doing up at this hour felt like an unsolvable riddle, made reality feel somewhat like a fever dream.

Tim didn't care about being seen as he passed window after window, had to keep his focus on not slipping on the wet metal steps, on keeping his trembling hands on the bar to avoid stumbling and falling

to his death. On keeping the air inside his lungs. All of the windows had their curtains drawn anyway.

When he'd made it to what he remembered to be the right floor – judging by the fuckton of traps built into and around the window he assumed he'd hit the jackpot – Tim's head was spinning so bad that he almost tumbled over the side of the fire escape. The cold air burned his throat with every heaving breath. His fucking *legs* were trembling.

Making quick work of disarming the traps, Tim slid the window open and crawled inside.

He didn't jump as much as he fell down from the windowsill, accidentally bumping his hip into a small table on his way inside. He only barely managed to catch a cup before it tipped over the edge, but the sounds of bullet shells raining down on the floorboards were as loud as gunshots in the deafening silence.

He froze, his heart hammering in his chest as he glanced around the vicinity with wide eyes.

A couch that had seen better days was jammed into the corner, a big, rectangular table placed in front of it. Perched on a three-legged chair was an old tv, one of its broken-off antennas hanging from the device by a small cord. The door to the bedroom was wide open, the bedroom itself vacant. Same could be said about the bathroom. The front door opposite him was closed, and the coat- and shoe racks were empty.

Tim placed the cup back on the small table with trembling fingers and noticed the fine layer of dust coating the wooden surface. The coffee in the bottom of the mug was dry. The apartment remained dark and quiet.

He was alone.

The sounds of the city were diminishing, overpowered by the blood roaring in Tim's ears. He turned around and grabbed the window frame, trying to slide it shut, but it got stuck halfway down, old, white paint flaking under his fingers.

"Come on, fuck, fuck, *fuck—"*

All his tugging achieved was cause the string holding the blinds up to loosen. He stumbled back as they almost dropped down on his head before they settled, slightly crooked, over the half-open window.

It was only then that he realized how hard his heart was beating in his chest, the silence revealing how his breaths were growing more shallow and frequent. He took another step back, pressing his palm flat to his chest, his other hand fisting his hair.

Catching sight of the ground, he saw how the water dripping from his clothes had formed puddles on the floor, and he frantically zipped his jacket open, tearing it off him and throwing it to the ground to get rid of the feeling of *suffocating.*

It was warmer in the apartment, way warmer than it had been outside but Tim's arms still prickled with goosebumps, his drenched sweater sticking to his skin. He needed...fuck, he needed to, he—

Stumbling past the front door, he made his way into the galley kitchen, his shoes squelching wetly against the wooden floor (*too loud, too loud, too loud—*), and the time displayed on the microwave glared angrily at him.

The completely unhelpful part of his brain noted that the sun would rise within the hour. That he, once again, had missed any chance of getting a full night's sleep.

He had to be at work in two hours. *Fuck*.

Forcing the thought away with a shudder, Tim snatched a plastic cup from the drying rack and turned on the faucet with shaking hands, filled the glass to the brim, and downed the water in a few gulps.

His skin was crawling, the product of anxiety or his limbs beginning to thaw, or perhaps even both. He just needed to sit down for a moment, just close his eyes, and allow himself to *breathe—*

I'm just disappointed.

You're a disappointment to the family name.

The voices, one from his distant past and the other from a meere hour ago, mixed together and played on an endless loop in his ears. He shook his head, trying to rid himself of the memories and the aggravating feeling of *betrayal* that bubbled up inside him.

He'd thought it would be different this time. Bruce had told him it would be different.

Fucking idiot.

He thought back on the time Bruce had walked in on him curled up in the kitchen of the Manor in the middle of the night.

Bruce had crouched down in front of him, voice low and rough but *comforting,* and had after a while managed to help Tim inch away from what would have probably been an unpleasant anxiety attack.

After, when they'd moved from the floor to the kitchen table and Tim had been given a steaming cup of tea and a blanket thrown over his shoulders, Bruce had told him – almost ordered him – that whenever the loss of control became too overwhelming, too much for him to handle, he should always call someone. That he shouldn't have to deal with it alone.

He remembered the concerned crease between Bruce's eyebrows when Tim had brushed him off and told him that he could handle it. And then when he'd hastily backtracked and promised that he *would* call someone, just so that the intense blue gaze would stop *analyzing* him, the crease had only deepened. As if Bruce had been able to *sense* the lies tumbling out of Tim's mouth.

But Bruce hadn't pushed. He'd simply put a hand on Tim's shoulder and squeezed gently and Tim had bit down on the inside of his cheek and dug his hidden nails into his arms to keep himself from collapsing into Bruce's arms or starting to cry or, God forbid, *both.*

He'd been all but forced to promise again, Bruce's hands still warm on his shoulder. Whatever the circumstances, he would call someone.

This was probably one of those moments. Tim should probably call someone. Or at least go through some of the breathing exercises or grounding techniques he'd found on the internet.

But he was fine. He just needed some time alone. A moment to gather his thoughts. To calm down. It was going to pass. It always did.

Tim's stomach twisted and gurgled as he swallowed his last gulp of water, coming up for air like a man drowning. He tried to think back on the last time he ate a substantial meal but was distracted by a sudden wave of nausea that almost punched the air out of him.

He groaned loudly, squeezing his eyes shut. His fingers tightened around the cup.

He knew it wasn't *real* nausea. It was his own body reacting to a threat that wasn't real. It was an overreaction. It was Tim

overreacting.

But it was still real enough to force Tim to bow his head, hold a hand over his stomach, and try to inhale a decent amount of air through his nose. He stifled a burp, fearing it might turn into a gag. *Fuck*. He should've probably drunk the water a bit slower.

When what felt like minutes had passed and nausea still hadn't subsided, he dropped the cup into the sink, wincing at the loud clatter, and leaned forward on his hands, fingers curled over the side of the countertop.

His breaths were starting to slip away from him. He coughed and breathed in deeply only to have the air rush out of him a moment later. Tried to, once again, convince his brain that everything was fine. He could feel his lungs expanding and deflating.

There was oxygen around him. He was safe and he was alone. It was scary as all hell, but it would pass. It would. Right?

That's what Bruce had told him, that night in the kitchen. He'd taken Tim's shaking and cold hand and he'd promised that it would be over soon. And he'd been right; a few minutes later it had passed.

But now Tim was alone. There was no one here to help him.

What if there actually *was* something wrong this time? What if this was what the beginning of a heart attack felt like? Was his system finally collapsing from his extensive caffeine intake during the past week?

No, no, no, he was fine. That was the panic talking. He was *fine.*

But even as Tim felt his chest rise and fall, even though *knew* that everything was as it should be, alarm bells were still going off in the back of his mind. Warning him of the threat lurking behind the collapsing dam as another crack tore through its walls.

The nausea was still not releasing its tight grip on his stomach and Bruce's words were echoing through his mind and why couldn't he just *breathe—*

The sound of rattling keys caused a flinch to tear through Tim's body. His eyes shot open as he heard the front door open with a whine behind him, and all sense of self-control was snatched away from him as he swirled around, heart in his throat.

He wanted to reach for his Bo staff, but before he could even remind himself that he left it at the manor, he realized he couldn't move. Frozen in fear like a deer in headlights.

The front door was hidden around the corner, and Tim could only get a clear view of the living room from his angle. However, the light from the corridor streamed into the darkness of the apartment, and the shadow of someone in the doorway stretched out across the floor.

The shadow wasn't moving, and even though Tim couldn't see the person directly, he sensed the tension building in the air.

The door slid shut, the last stream of light crawling across the floor until it was snuffed out of existence. There was a soft click, and it wasn't until a few moments later when the lights in the apartment had yet to turn on that the sound registered in Tim's brain as the safety on a gun being flicked.

Move, Tim's mind screamed at him. *Hide.*

Just then, a figure stepped into Tim's view through the alcove, and Tim's body froze over. In the dim light provided by the streetlights outside the window, Tim was able to see who it was.

Jason Todd was dressed in civilian clothing. A white plastic bag and a set of keys dangled from one of his clenched fists, rustling softly as he moved. The gun in his other hand, however, didn't make a sound.

Jason's whole body was tense, looking like a coil ready to spring. Even in the dark, Tim could see that his eyes were wide and alert, taking in every inch of the living room. He'd probably noticed the window Tim had left wide open. Or the wet footprints riddling the floor.

The footprints that would lead him directly to Tim.

Tim watched, heart beating a staccato in his chest, as Jason cast a quick glance into the kitchen and immediately locked eyes with Tim. The gun was aiming at Tim's head in an instant, and Tim instinctively hunched up, raising his hands to shield his face.

"No, no, d-don't—*it's me!"*

Tim's voice sounded choked as the words tumbled out of his mouth. It felt like his heart was beating through his stomach. Oh God, he was really going to hurl.

Through his fingers, Tim saw Jason's brow furrow in concentration as he squinted into the darkness. For a moment Tim was sure the gun was going to go off. Then Jason's arm dropped to his side.

"*Jesus,*" Jason said breathlessly, lowering his head as some of the tension drained from his body. "I almost shot you."

Tim didn't know what to say to that. He didn't really know if he *could* say anything at all.

The invisible bar around his chest had tightened to the point where he could only suck in small amounts of air at a time. His heart was beating like a horse's galloping hooves in his chest.

Fuck. Fucking fuck, no, no, no, Jason couldn't be here. Why wasn't he in Blüdhaven?

Tim's vision swam and his hands gripped the lip of the counter behind him when he swayed, bile threatening to rise up his throat.

Suddenly, Jason's loud voice filtered through the roaring of his ears.

"Well? What the fuck do you want."

Tim flinched, his attention snapping to Jason.

His jacket was gone, as was the plastic bag and the gun. He was leaning against the kitchen doorway, arms crossed, a distasteful scowl on his face.

Before Tim got the time to comprehend the question, Jason barreled on.

"If this is about Dick you can just give up while you're ahead and get the fuck out. I ain't talking to him."

Tim couldn't do this. He needed to leave. He needed to leave, *now*.

But his body was frozen in the spot, his lungs aching more and more with every labored breath.

There was movement, and suddenly the ceiling light flickered on. It made Tim start so badly that he lost his grip on the counter, barely managing to keep himself upright as he squeezed his eyes shut, pressing his lips together.

He wasn't going to hurl in front of Jason. *He wasn't.*

In the presence of light, Jason seemed to finally acknowledge Tim's appearance because he was quiet for so long that Tim had to pry his eyes open to check if he'd actually left. When he did, he noticed the visible way Jason's back had straightened, how his expression had gone from annoyed to alert in a matter of seconds

"Did you fall into Gotham River?" Jason asked. His gaze drifted to his left, out toward the living room and the open window, and his eyes widened as he put two and two together. His head snapped back to Tim. "Wait, did you *walk* here?"

Too much. There were too many things happening. Too many questions, too many noises, too many lights.

Jason's blurry figure took a step toward him and Tim could barely suppress his flinch. Jason stopped dead in his tracks. The following silence would've been deafening if it hadn't been for Tim's wheezing breaths.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Tim grimaced and put his face in his hands. When that didn't work, he threaded his fingers through his hair, tugging. "N-nothing, nothing, just, just *shut up* for a second."

"Are you injured?"

Tim whined and shook his head.

Why couldn't he just shut up?

"Scarecrow?

Tim shook his head again, this time more vehemently. His hands fell from his hair, and he grabbed the counter with one and pressed the other one against his chest. The feeling of his heart racing against his palm made him dizzy.

Jason took another step forward, sending another wave of panic up Tim's spine, causing his breath to hitch.

Jason stilled. He was quiet for a moment, sharp eyes narrowing. Then; "Then what the fuck is wrong with you?"

"I don't know, I don't know, I, *fuck*—" Tim squeezed his eyes shut as a sudden sob rattled his chest. Talking was becoming difficult. It felt

like he'd gotten an anesthetic shot to his gums. "He's gonna, I can't—"

And that was when the air completely left Tim's lungs. He tried, desperately, to take another deep breath, to do what his lungs were designed and *begging him* to do. But he couldn't. He *couldn't*.

Tim's eyes were burning, his vision blurring, and, yeah, no, he had to get out of there, *now*.

Pushing himself away from the counter, Tim ignored Jason's surprised, "Hey!" as he forced himself past him and hurried out into the living room.

He could find someplace else to stay. Jason had five safe houses spread out across Crime Alley alone. It'd take Tim some time to actually be able to track them down, sure, but it beat spending another second with another person in the room. With *Jason* in the room.

The window was still open when he rounded the corner, the cold breeze wafting into the apartment causing the blinds to sway, bumping against the glass. Tim's steps immediately faltered, his heart sinking to his stomach.

Through the wide slits in the shades, the rain had started to pick up. Raindrops fell from the sky like water from a showerhead, so loud that it was almost booming.

He didn't want to go outside again. He'd be drenched, this time in a matter of seconds. He was still shivering from what the last stroll had caused him, his toes still numb from the cold. His breath hitched again, the emotions inside him rising to a crescendo. He didn't know what to do. He didn't know where to go.

Suddenly Jason was standing beside him, his hand moving to grab Tim's upper arm.

Tim flinched, pulling himself out of the way so violently that he stumbled into the wall. Images of glowing eyes flashed before him, the memory of cold metal kissing his neck reminding him of what the man in front of him would do if he got the chance.

"Don't touch me, don't, I can't—"

"Kid, hey—"

Jason's voice sounded further away than before, but Tim didn't care anymore. His chest burned, spreading through him like wildfire. Jason's, Bruce's, and Jack's voices all mixed together. If they could see him now, they would realize how fragile and weak the real Tim Drake was.

But why wouldn't he? Everything he'd cared about had already been taken away from him once.

Mom. Dad. Bruce.

Robin.

And now his photography.

And it would never stop. He would never be in control. If Bruce could take his camera - a part of his *life* outside of the mask from him without a moment's hesitation - then what would happen if he realized that Tim wasn't fit for the role of Red Robin? What would happen when he realized that Tim wasn't fit for the role of a *Wayne*—

And just like that, the dam broke.

The full force of panic that welled up in his chest caused the world to tilt. He staggered to the side, sliding down the wall as his knees finally gave way under him. His ears roared, muffling the sound of Jason's voice calling out to him.

His chest felt worse than before; burning and numb and tingly. His throat ached. His *heart* ached.

This didn't feel right, *Tim* didn't feel right.

Hands suddenly wrapped around Tim's arms, and his head spun as he found himself hoisted upright, pinned against the wall behind him. He tried to tear himself free, but only managed to draw his knees to his chest, wrapping his arms around them, protecting himself.

Oh God, this was hell. He was going to die. Everything felt like it was burning and nothing made sense and it was *terrifying* and he just needed everything to stop and—

A new weight pressed against his chest and Tim's skin crawled at the touch. The pressure made him feel trapped, made the shallow rise and fall of his chest too noticeable.

At the same time, it was the only thing that kept him somewhat tied to his own body, the only thing keeping him from floating away never to return again. He grabbed at the weight – *a hand* – not sure if he should be prying it off him or making sure it never left.

With the sliver of awareness that the pressure provided, a voice filtered through.

“Red, I need you to breathe.”

Tim shook his head, each one of his breaths chasing a new one. He felt burning hot tears running down his cheeks and he knew he probably should stop because *this is not how a Drake behaves*, but he had no idea *how*. His skin was stretched too tight across his body, itching, burning, and tingling in a way that made him want to grab a knife and skin himself.

Through his blurred vision, he saw Jason lean in close.

“Kid, *hey,* focus up. Do you have the antidote?”

Antidote? What for?

Did he think Scarecrow did this?

“I-it’s n-not, not S-scarecrow,” Tim forced out between choked-off breaths.

Jason’s expression softened into confusion. “What the fuck do you mean it’s not—”

A wave of dizziness washed over Tim, drowning out the rest of Jason’s sentence as blood roared in his ears. His head buzzed, his chest aching and his stomach flipping and his throat wheezed weirdly like it was closing up and God, maybe it was. Maybe heart attacks *did* feel like this. It occurred to him that he *had* been feeling unusually tired during the past few weeks. Maybe it was his missing spleen. Oh God, that could actually be it. Maybe he was going to die at any moment.

Fuck. He didn’t want to die.

“Jason”, Tim sobbed between heaves of air. “I’m…I think I’m…am I dying? I think I’m—”

“You’re not fucking dying”, Jason snapped, his face a shade paler than before.

Tim shook his head. Or maybe it was his whole body that was shaking. “My spleen”, he gasped and pressed his hand to his side, above the empty space where the organ used to sit. “I don’t…m-maybe it’s—” a sudden sob followed by a rasping gasp cut him off.

“Red—"

“I think, i-it’s…something’s, something’s wrong with,” he paused, heaving open-mouthed breaths into the cold air, “my, my s-spleen—”

“Tim, for fucks sake, shut up and *breathe*.”

Tim’s breath hitched as a new wave of burning tears ran down his cheeks. “I-I can’t, I—”

And he really couldn’t. No, not with this fucking *pressure* compressing him from all sides, this overwhelming panic and loss of control that didn’t make any sense being there in the first place.

Jason – *Jason*, the small part of Tim’s brain that was somehow still thinking logically screamed at him, *the Red Hood, a notorious murderer, the man who tried to* kill *you not even three months ago* – pressed his hand more firmly against Tim’s chest, eyes boring into his.

“Yes, you can. Hey!” He ducked his head, trying to catch Tim’s flickering gaze. “You can.”

Tim felt his lower lip trembling as he shook his head again. “I’m, I don’t— I don’t know what to do, I can’t, he’s gonna, Bruce, he’s—” Tim squeezed his eyes shut, the air too thin and his lungs too heavy.

His head spun like a Ferris wheel and his lips tingled as if the ability to *feel* was slowly seeping out of his body, and his hands felt strange and distant, and static danced before his eyes, and *oh*—

“I th-think I’m gonna p-pass out.”

His voice sounded wrong. Distant and broken and *weak*. What would Jack say if he saw him like this? What would *Bruce*—

“Tim.”

There was something new in Jason’s voice, something so unlike Jason that the surprise of it made Tim snap his eyes open. He was met with Jason’s eyes boring into his own, his brows deeply furrowed.

Suddenly, Jason grabbed Tim’s hand and pressed it against his own

chest, trapping it in place. Tim instinctively bundled the sweater in a tight fist, clutching it like a lifeline. Jason's hand was scorching against his frozen skin.

"Hey, look at me."

When Tim managed to focus in on him, he was met with Jason staring down at him, eyes wide. Once he saw that Tim was listening, he continued, urgency coating his voice. "You need to *focus*. Breathe with me, okay?"

Tim tried, he really did, but the first attempt ended with Tim choking on his own inhale, the second with him almost throwing up. A searing hot flash that could also have been an ice-cold shiver ran up Tim's spine and it kinda felt like he was beginning to float. He felt his eyes roll in his sockets as white spots danced in front of his eyes.

Oh, man. He was actually going to pass out.

"Robin."

It was pure instinct, reacting to the name. The word was embedded into his DNA, triggering a part of his brain that, even if he were to be at death's door, would force him to stop and breathe and *listen*.

The word that awakened the only part of him that he was genuinely proud of.

He knew what Jason meant. He called him *Red* more often than not. *Robin* was technically just the other half of the name. Still, the overwhelming and indecipherable *emotions* that washed over him upon hearing the name coming from *Jason* were enough to pull him back from the verge of unconsciousness.

When his vision tunneled enough for him to see something besides darkness, his gaze found Robin's. *His* Robin.

Jason's face was ashen, but his jaw was clenched and his eyes determined as they scanned Tim's face. Seeming to find what he was looking for, he squeezed Tim's hand firmly. "Don't do that, buddy, okay? Listen to me. Breathe with me, in and out. I got you."

How did it feel, calling your own replacement by the title that had been *taken* from you?

This was Tim's Robin. This was the Robin he'd looked up to, the Robin

he'd photographed back when he was barely even a teenager. The Robin he'd cried over when he'd realized what had happened to him. The Robin he'd been terrified to succeed, knowing he'd never be able to live up to the name.

In no scenario would he ever *not* be able to listen to his Robin.

So, Tim pinched his eyes shut in concentration and, with the self-control only an ex-Robin could muster, turned his back on his fear, and *listened*.

It…took a while. A very, *very* long while. Jason's voice was there through it all, going from giving stern orders to murmuring soft encouragements, keeping his own breath steady and slow for Tim to follow. Tim found himself focusing on Jason's heartbeat beating against his own hand, slightly erratic yet steady as a rock.

Tha-dump, tha-dump, tha-dump.

With every beat, Tim's breaths became deeper and slower until he finally managed to follow the instructions Jason was muttering to him.

"Breath in, slowly – through your *nose*, Tim. Good job – now hold… and breathe out, five Mississippi, come on. Good, that's good, you're alright. Again."

In the end, once the roaring in Tim's ears had been reduced to a soft hum, he (not completely willingly) bowed his head forward, leaning his forehead against Jason's collarbone. The man tensed but didn't move to push Tim away, and Tim felt the soft vibrations through Jason's chest as he continued talking, the movement of his jaw against the side of his head.

A few minutes later, once seemingly satisfied with Tim's breathing, Jason fell quiet.

For a moment they both just breathed.

The tension slowly drained out of Tim's body like blood from an open wound. Sensation gradually started to seep into Tim's fingers again, but they still ached when he flexed them too quickly.

When he felt strong enough to move, he lifted his head from Jason's chest and leaned back against the wall, knowing if he remained hunched forward like that he definitely wouldn't be able to stop

himself from collapsing into Jason's arms. And he would very much like to limit himself to only one humiliating act per day.

Awareness slowly crept back to him – it was like his senses suddenly decided to *work* again. He could feel the cold breeze that wafted in through the open window, took note of the subdued trembling of his body, and shifted when the hardness of the wall pressing into his back became a bit too much.

His cheeks were wet and he tasted salt when he licked his cracked lips. Lifting a shaky hand, he scraped it across his face, a groan of disgust escaping him as he wiped away dried tears and snot.

"Hey. You good?"

Jason sounded weird. Uncertain, almost nervous. It was so un-Jason-like that it made Tim squirm. He suddenly realized he still had Jason's sweater in a death grip and quickly released him, his face heating up in embarrassment.

"Yeah", he croaked. "Yeah, I'm…good." He sniffed wetly and pressed the soaking wet sleeve of his sweater against his eye. "*Fuck*."

He felt Jason shift slightly in front of him before a handful of tissue was pressed into his grasp. Tim managed a quiet "thank you," before he wiped his face clean and softly blew his nose. All the while being very aware of and very much avoiding Jason's hard stare. When he was done, Jason plucked the used tissues out of Tim's grasp – which, *ew* – and quickly disposed of them in a nearby trashcan. The floorboards creaked when he squatted back down in front of Tim, elbows propped on his knees.

A heavy silence fell between them. The realization of what just happened was slowly starting to dawn on Tim, and he didn't know what to do. Someone had just witnessed him freak out. *Jason* had just witnessed him freak out.

Oh man, he was never going to live this down.

Shame, a feeling that he'd grown accustomed to over the years, burned like acid in his stomach. What the hell was he supposed to do now? Just...leave? Offer an explanation? An apology?

Hey, sorry for the mental breakdown; Bruce took my camera and I freaked out like a spoiled brat.

God, this was going to be so fucking humiliating. And *awkward*.

Tim sniffed and bowed his head. Began to fiddle with the fabric of his jeans on his knee, scraping it with the nail of his thumb. He wished, not for the first time that evening, that Jason would just *leave*. Or start throwing punches. Honestly, *anything* was better than the suffocating silence that lingered between them.

In front of him, Jason shifted. His wet shoes squeaked against the floorboards.

Why is he still here? Tim thought, drawing his knees closer. *Why isn't he hurting him?*

“Kid—”

“Please go away”, Tim croaked. The words were spoken so quietly he might as well have whispered them.

There was a moment’s pause where Jason seemed to digest Tim's response.

“You do realize you’re in *my* apartment.”

And even though it had been subtle, Tim immediately recognized the words for what they were. A dismissal. And an appropriate one at that. This wasn’t Tim’s space. Why would Jason be the one to leave?

It was strange, though. Tim knew he wouldn't have been able to stay on the floor of a stranger’s apartment forever. Hell, he didn't *want* to stay there longer than he had to with *Jason* squatting a few feet away from him. As the panic disappeared and lucidity returned to him, he was finding it harder and harder to look at the man for longer than a few seconds at a time, scared of being met with a pair of glowing green eyes.

But Tim had been unarmed and vulnerable. He wouldn’t have been able to defend himself. A quick hit to the head, the pull of a trigger, and *boom,* that would’ve been it. But Jason had done neither. Instead, he’d stepped up, had guided Tim through the worst minutes (hours? Tim wasn’t sure) of his life. He’d *helped* him.

Beyond the tension of Jason’s shoulders – which honestly seemed to stem from the awkwardness that surrounded them rather than the preparation of an attack – there was nothing threatening about his posture whatsoever. And even now as he sat crouched in front of Tim,

still with the power to break bones more easily than last time, Tim found himself surprisingly calm.

For some strange reason, he was starting to feel…*safe*.

Okay, no, safe was pushing it.

Not as panicky.

Yeah, that was probably it.

So when he realized he was being told to get the fuck out of dodge, it felt like his heart had sunk down into his stomach.

Swallowing past the lump in his throat, Tim took a shaky breath. "Fine, I…I'll leave."

He placed his palm on his knee, moving to push himself to his feet, but a hand suddenly shot forward and grabbed his arm in a tight grip, forcing him to stop.

Tim's entire body recoiled and his eyes immediately snapped to Jason, his heart leaving his stomach to instead jump up to his throat when he saw the scowl plastered on Jason's face.

The sensation of air disappearing from his lungs washed over Tim for the second time that night, his throat feeling like it was closing up.

Fuck. He'd been too quick to judge. Of course Jason wouldn't make this easy for him. There *had* to be consequences for sneaking into one of Red Hood's safehouses completely unwarranted. What would it be this time? A concussion? Another broken nose? A sprained ankle, bruised ribs, a slit throat—

The hand disappeared from his arm as quickly as it had appeared. Tim dropped to the floor, immediately trying to push himself further back against the wall, his head spinning. Confusion washed over him when he looked up and caught Jason's wide eyes. As he noticed the look of *alarm* in them.

Jason had rocked back on his heels, his palms raised up in front of him in a placating gesture. He almost fell over at his shifted weight, and his shoes squeaked again as he regained his balance.

"Sorry, shit, *sorry*. I wasn't…I didn't mean to—"

He cut himself off. Tim saw his Adam's apple bobbing as he swallowed

convulsively. His jaw ticked, and his mouth worked soundlessly as he seemed to struggle to come up with the right words.

“I just… I didn’t mean you had to *leave*.”

Tim stared at him. Tried to make sense of what he was hearing. Of what he was *seeing*.

Jason was treating him like one would a cornered animal. His shoulders were hunched in a way that made him look smaller, his chest not facing Tim directly, but instead twisted off to the side. As if he was making an effort in trying to *not* scare Tim. It was almost like looking at a complete stranger.

Jason still looked rattled – an expression Tim had never witnessed on him before – when he, after a few seconds of silence had passed, heaved a sigh and let his hands drop to his sides. A heavy silence settled between them. Tim’s heart was slowing down, the burst of panic slowly melting away, giving way to an array of emotions that swirled around in his head, making him dizzy. Confusion, uncertainty, and an exhaustion so intense that it made his vision a little blurry. But most of all, he just felt embarrassed. *Humiliated.*

Tim shuddered again and wrapped his arms around his knees, feeling completely out of his depth. Jason’s hand twitched, as if he was about to reach out but stopped himself at the last second.

“Kid—"

“I’m sorry.”

The muffled words slipped out before Tim could stop them, and he winced, pressing his lips together. In the corner of his eye, Tim saw Jason recoil, felt his widening eyes zero in on his face.

“Why the fuck are you apologizing?”

Jason’s words were sharper than before, something akin to annoyance coating his tone. Starting to sound more like himself, Tim realized, but he could still hear the confusion, the crease between Jason’s eyebrows betraying his true emotions.

Tim shrugged. Started to fiddle with his shoelaces. “I…just showing up and…” Tim paused and hugged his knees closer to himself. The sweater clung to his skin as he shifted, making him shudder. “I didn’t mean to…freak out like that.”

Jason was quiet for a moment.

“The fuck.”

The words were soft, spoken under his breath, but before Tim could ask him what was wrong, Jason continued. “Kid, I didn’t think you did that on *purpose*.”

Tim didn’t know what to say to that. “I know, I *didn’t*, I just…” he trailed off, pressing his chin against his knee. “I’m sorry.”

About everything. About Robin. The Joker. That they were in this mess to begin with. That Tim was probably interrupting what might’ve been Jason’s only day off in months.

Jason fell quiet again. Then he cleared his throat, and when he spoke, he sounded as honest as Tim had ever heard him. “Yeah, well, don’t be. You’ve got nothing to be sorry for.”

Tim fell silent, keeping his gaze firmly fixed on the tips of his shoes. The words were put on repeat in his mind as he tried to break down the meaning behind them, to understand what the hell he was hearing.

This was the guy who had beaten Tim to a bloody pulp less than a year ago. He’d told Tim that he’d been the main *reason* to his anger, that he’d been his main target in his quest for revenge. That Tim was going to be sorry for ever stepping into the suit. And here was that same guy, brushing off the apologies he’d tried so hard to pull out of Tim when he’d been bleeding out on the floor.

Telling him it wasn’t his *fault*.

You’ve got nothing to be sorry for.

Jason sighed again, bringing Tim out of his thoughts. “Does Bruce know you’re here?”

Tim shook his head and as an afterthought rasped, “Left my phone.” He had half-expected Jason to go fetch his own phone and order him to call the man and ask him to pick him up. But instead, to Tim’s surprise, Jason just settled down fully on the floor. All criss-cross applesauce, leaning forward so that he could rest his elbows against his knees, slowing down his movements marginally when he noticed the way Tim shrunk in on himself.

“Good,” Jason said, making himself comfortable. “Seems like he deserves a heart attack right about now when he notices you’re gone.”

It was at that moment that Tim noticed what he was wearing. It was an Attack on Titan graphic hoodie, which in and of itself managed to *not* be the strangest thing about this situation. No, what was *truly* strange was the fact that it looked suspiciously similar to the one Tim had seen Dick wear numerous times before. A realization that made Tim’s heart ache just a little. It even had the orange stains from the time Dick had tried to bleach his hair.

However, the thing that discerned this hoodie from Dick’s were the darker, suspiciously tear-shaped stains just under the shoulder, visible even on the dark fabric. Tim quickly lowered his gaze, feeling his neck grow warm.

The detective trait must’ve been something that Bruce had managed to imprint on each and every person who stepped foot in the Manor, because Tim saw the way Jason froze and then shifted as he put two and two together.

“Look, kid,” he said after a moment of silence, choosing his words carefully. “This…this isn’t your fault, alright? It’s…you can’t control these things.”

The emotional whiplash was making Tim’s head spin.

Was he trying to comfort him?

Tim kept his gaze locked on his knee, remaining quiet as he began tugging on a piece of thread that stuck out of the fabric.

Jason shifted again, seemingly restless. “Do you, uh, wanna…talk about it ?” he asked, the words coming out stutteringly and *painfully* awkward.

Oh God, he actually was.

The absurdity of the question – of the whole *situation* – startled a choked laugh out of Tim. In the corner of his eye, Tim saw Jason wince.

“Yeah, that felt really fucking weird coming from me,” he mumbled, rubbing at his neck.

Tim couldn’t help but wheeze out an uncertain laugh again, his mind

reeling. He tried to wrap his head around the situation, tried and failed to find something familiar about what was happening to ground himself.

“How did you know how to do that?”

Tim met Jason’s confused gaze, startled at his own hushed question. Still, he for some reason found himself clarifying it. “I mean the, um. The thing with…with the breathing.”

Jason’s eyes narrowed and Tim immediately ducked his head, his face heating up. He suddenly wished the ground would swallow him whole. He shouldn’t have asked, it wasn’t his place to—

“Bruce.”

Tim was shocked into lifting his gaze. He was suddenly convinced that mindreading was an additional ability granted to those who decided to take a post-mortem swim in the Lazarus Pit.

It was impossible to discern what emotion was residing in Jason’s eyes. He looked uncomfortable and slightly frustrated. But mostly, Tim realized, he looked *vulnerable*. His eyes kept flickering off of Tim’s face to a spot on Tim’s shoulder, his hands fidgeting in his lap.

Jason cleared his throat, looking down at his hands. “I—I get them too, sometimes. It...Bruce helps me.”

Tim stared at him. Something in his mind loosened and broke off, morphing into something different. His assumptions of the man – of the *boy* – sitting in front of him, he realized, were not all correct. Not even close.

“Oh,” he rasped.

Jason snorted, seemingly finding his hands very interesting. “Yes. *Oh.”*

Silence fell between them, strangely comfortable in the strangeness of it all, the minds of both parties reeling as they were forced to reevaluate certain biases created around one another.

“I…Bruce and I had a fight.”

Tim didn’t know *why* he was telling Jason this. It was just tumbling out of him without his consent. He still sounded congested, even after blowing his nose, his voice gravely and cracking.

Jason nodded, a tightness forming in the corner of his mouth. “Dear ol’ dad say something that set you off?”

Tim’s arms tightened around his legs.

You’re a disappointment to the family name.

“No- I mean—”

Jason raised a brow at Tim’s stuttering and Tim sighed, rubbing his eye with the sleeve of his hoodie. “It’s just…it’s been a rough couple of weeks.”

Jason’s eyebrows twitched. Then he nodded as if he understood exactly what Tim meant. A part of Tim thought he almost looked guilty.

The first rays of sunlight slid in through the blinds, cutting a bright line through the air. Tim hadn’t even noticed when it had stopped raining, let alone that the sun had risen. He watched the dust swirl around in the air, disappearing and reappearing as it escaped and entered the sun’s ray.

Everything was so peaceful. So different from the panic that had engulfed the apartment only minutes before.

A gust of wind blew in through the window, the blinds rustling in the breeze, and Tim was suddenly reminded of how *cold* he was. His sweater was still damp, the moisture caught in the fabric made it feel like it was turning to ice. He grew slightly concerned by the fact that he still couldn’t really feel his toes.

A shiver raked through him, so violent he jabbed his elbow into the wall. Jason’s hand immediately hovered over Tim’s arm, his eyes alert. “Hey, what’s—”

“It’s fine.” Tim shivered again, curling into himself even more. “I’m just c-cold.”

Jason blinked. Then he looked down at Tim’s clothes.

“Oh, right. Shit.”

Then, suddenly, he was gone. Tim stared after him where he’d disappeared into the bedroom, suppressing another shiver that ran up his spine. His ass was starting to fall asleep, and he shifted, moving his

weight to the side and only keeping one knee propped up to his chest. His joints protested and cracked, feeling like they'd been locked in place.

Jason returned quickly, squatting down in front of Tim.

"Alright," he said. Then, as if it just occurred to him; "Hey, you're not vegan, right?"

Tim blinked. *What.*

"What?"

"Vegan," Jason repeated, articulating the word maybe a tad too aggressively than necessary. "You know, like the evil spawn."

Tim wondered if he had to worry about a possible stroke. Whether it was he or Jason who was the victim was still unclear.

"Damian is a vegetarian," he said, the confusion in his voice evident even to his own ears.

Jason breathed out sharply out of his mouth (dear lord had that been a laugh?). "Good for him," he said, and yup, that was the twitch of a smile. What the fuck.

Apparently finding Tim incompetent to answer his question, Jason changed tactics. "Do you eat chicken?"

Tim opened and closed his mouth wordlessly. "I…yes?"

Jason nodded. "Good, 'cause all I got is takeaway."

"Oh...I, uh…" Tim swallowed, fiddling with the hem of his sweater. A strange feeling of hope was building in his chest. "I'm…I can stay?"

Jason's attention was immediately drawn to Tim again. His brows furrowed as a look of confusion washed over his features. "Yes? I thought— what, you want to go back to the Manor instead?"

When Tim immediately shook his head Jason's confusion seemed to double as he regarded him weirdly. "Well, then yeah, you can stay. What, you thought I was just gonna kick you out on the street or something?"

Tim's lack of ability to maintain eye contact seemed to be enough of an answer. Jason's mouth twisted into a wry grimace. Then he sighed.

“You know, I may be an asshole, but I’d like to think I’m getting better,” he muttered under his breath.

Tim’s head sunk almost all the way to his shoulders. “Sorry.”

“No, don’t I—” Jason’s sentence was cut short by another sharp sigh. He rubbed his forehead, looking frustrated. “Don’t be sorry, I was trying to—” Taking a breath, Jason hastily let the topic drop. “Can you stand?”

Tim, overwhelmed by the events that were transpiring, could only nod.

“Alright,” Jason said, and carefully grabbed Tim’s arms just above his elbows. “On three.”

Together, they managed to wrangle Tim onto his feet. Tim’s head spun when the feeling of vertigo surged through him. He had to lean back against the wall to avoid falling onto his ass, his stomach churning, and God, when was this goddamn nausea going to *go away?*

Jason made sure not to let his hand linger this time, and Tim watched warily as the man reached for something on the ground.

“What—are we going somewhere?”

“Nope,” Jason said, straightening his back. In the next moment, a bundle of fabric was unceremoniously shoved into Tim’s arms. *“You*, however, are taking a shower.”

Tim instinctively grabbed the clothes and towel, thawing fingers digging into the soft material. He looked down in a daze, brushing his thumb over the faded logo printed on the hoodie, his mind racing. He felt like he was still three steps behind in their conversation, not entirely sure what was happening.

“I—”

“It’s over there.”

Tim glanced out into the hallway, the direction that Jason had gestured in. “What is?”

Jason looked at Tim as if he was being willfully ignorant. “The shower,” he said slowly.

Tim’s gaze flickered off to the side, immediately reminded of the

bathroom he'd seen leading off of the hallway. "Oh."

Jason spared him another scrutinizing look and God, maybe this was what Bruce had been teaching Jason at the Manor. Tim swore he felt as dissected now as he did whenever Bruce leveled him with one of his x-ray looks.

Jason then sighed, making a shooing motion. "Go on. You can use up all the warm water, I don't care."

In all honesty, a hot shower sounded heavenly.

***

In the end, it was even *better*.

Once the hot water finally decided to show up after a solid minute of waiting, Tim almost fell asleep standing under the showerhead. His fingers and toes burned pleasantly as the warmth coaxed feeling into them, and his mind slowly started to wind down, his body relaxing.

A while later when he'd toweled off and quickly put on the borrowed clothes, he wiped off the fogged-up mirror and caught sight of his reflection. Couldn't help but freeze and stare at the person looking back at him, taking in the gaunt look on his face, the shadows under his eyes, the redness and puffiness of them making him look like he was recovering from an allergic reaction.

You've got nothing to be sorry for.

The words helped quell the feeling of embarrassment that had sparked to life in his chest. He took a deep breath and looked away from his reflection.

You can't control these things.

Said in a way only someone who *knew* what it felt like could. Someone who'd been in the same position before. Someone who *understood.*

For a moment, the world went a bit blurry. Then Tim blinked everything into focus again, sniffing angrily. He was tired of crying. The headache that was starting to form behind his eyes made sure to

second that notion.

He wrung out his wet clothes and hung them on the shower curtain rail, towel-dried his hair, and exited the bathroom. Jason was in the kitchen, peering into the humming microwave, the lights from within dancing across his face. When he noticed Tim standing awkwardly in the kitchen doorway, he looked over.

“Move your ass to the couch,” he said, turning to the food again with a scowl. “You look like you’re gonna fall over.”

Tim hesitantly stumbled into the living room and sunk down into the cushions. There was the sound of rustling from the kitchen, the ding of a microwave followed by the clank of plates. The window had been closed, the blinds turned to more effectively stop the sunlight from entering the apartment. Tim could hear the sounds from outside, of cars driving by, an occasional barking dog, and people waking up to start their day.

Tim shifted on the couch, leaning his head back against the backrest. Who knew that mornings in Crime Alley could be so peaceful?

As was quickly proven, the couch was *a lot* comfier than it looked. Tim felt himself starting to drift, his eyelids drooping on their own accord. To him, only a few seconds had passed when there was a sudden tap on his shoulder. He startled awake, blinking down at the steaming bowl of stir-fried noodles held in front of him. The smell immediately made his stomach growl, and the mystery was thereby suddenly solved; the reason that the nausea wasn’t going away was because he was fucking *starving*.

Jason pushed the bowl into Tim’s hands impatiently, forcing Tim to take it. “I’m not gonna feed you if that’s what you’re thinking.”

Tim settled the bowl in his lap, and a pair of chopsticks slid into his hand as Jason sat down heavily on the other end of the couch. A glass of water rested on the table in front of Tim.

Jason propped his feet – now only clad in wool socks – on the table and nodded toward the TV. “You want it on?”

Tim shrugged, and Jason picked up the remote and flicked to a channel where an unrecognizable sitcom was playing. The sound of distorted laughter echoing through the room sounded misplaced in the heavy silence. Despite Jason’s attempts at hiding it, Tim could sense the tension in his shoulders, felt a similar unease hanging in the air

even after everything.

But Tim couldn't *really* find himself to care. The food was warm – so warm that when he blew on it for a full ten seconds before chomping it down he still got the inside of his mouth burned – and the noodles were a bit dry, but it was fucking *delicious*. Tim had to remind himself to pace himself when he almost forgot to chew and the noodles nearly got stuck halfway down his throat.

"Jesus, don't die," Jason said, eyeing Tim warily when he took another gulp of water to chase down the food. Tim subtly raised his middle finger from the glass as he drank and swore he saw the corner of Jason's lips twitch upwards.

"Ass."

Tim smirked. He stabbed at the noodles with his chopsticks, pinching and twirling them. The sound of the chopsticks scraping against ceramic and the canned laughter echoing around them were the only things accompanying their silence.

"So..." Tim said after a while. "Why aren't you in Blüdhaven?"

Jason's eyes narrowed as he turned to look at him. "How did you—"

Tim wiped sauce from the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand and shrugged. "A little bird told me."

"Very funny," Jason said. Then he turned back to the TV and didn't say anything else.

The silence that followed made Tim suddenly uneasy. He had a sinking feeling that he'd overstepped a line. That he'd misstepped and heard the *click* of a landmine. He redirected his focus to the screen, trying to ignore the nervousness building in his gut.

A new program had begun playing when Jason finally spoke.

"I had a fight with Dick."

Jason was looking at the TV – or, rather *through* the TV – when Tim turned to him. He subconsciously traced the buttons on the remote with his thumb as he continued. "I said some things that were stupid. He got angry, and so I got angry and then I stormed off." He took a deep breath, seemingly blinking the memory from his eyes, glancing away from the screen. "It was stupid."

Tim lowered the bowl in his lap, fiddling with the chopsticks, unsure of what to say. “I’m sorry.”

Jason closed his eyes, looking close to throttling him. “Stop fucking apologizing.”

“I just meant—”

“Yeah, I know what you meant. I don’t want to hear it.”

Another wave of laughter rolled over them. Sunlight forced itself through the crack along the side of the blinds, creating a pale yellow streak on the wall. There was a click and the fridge started making weird rumbling noises from the kitchen. Somewhere in the apartment complex, someone was showering and singing very off-key.

Jason sighed again. Then he glanced over at Tim. “Do you need anything else? I think I have cereal if you’re still hungry.”

Tim paused, belatedly remembering that he had to actually respond instead of just staring at the man in shock. Slowly, he jerkily shook his head. “Uh, no, I’m good." He inclined the bowl slightly for Jason to see as he continued, “I still got food left, so…”

Jason nodded, his face closed off as he turned back to the TV. Tim kept looking at him for a moment longer, before he turned to look down on his bowl of food, twirling the noodles around with his chopsticks.

“Why are you being so nice to me?” Tim murmured. The words had left his mouth before he knew he’d even formed them, and he didn’t even have to look at Jason to notice the way he immediately tensed. Which was when Tim realized he might've just royally fucked everything up. The silence that followed was heavy, the air around them turning heavy and thick, similar to what it did just before a strike of thunder. Before he managed to dig himself a deeper grave, Tim shoved an even larger bundle of noodles into his mouth, curling in on himself. Wishing once again that the ground would engulf him the same way he was inhaling his food.

Another wave of laughter washed over them, but Jason remained quiet. Tim hoped he was just ignoring him, that Jason wasn’t fighting the urge to discard everything he’d said to Tim barely an hour ago and do a visual recap of what had happened in the Titan’s Tower all those months ago.

Jason's hands were curled into clenched fists. Tim kept his eyes on his food, just waiting, waiting for the inevitable—

"Because I owe it to you."

If Tim hadn't just managed to swallow down his last mouthful he was sure he would've choked for real this time. His attention snapped to Jason so quickly that his head spun. Jason's gaze was dead set on the TV, his face illuminated by the pale light. His shadow danced on the wall behind him, the light shifting color as the scenes on the screen changed.

Jason's chest was rising and falling more rapidly than before. Even as he'd noticeably tensed, body as rigid as a statue, he seemed to also have shrunk in on himself. His shoulders drooped as if a heaviness had been placed on them, slowly crushing him as he was starting to give way under the weight of it all.

Jason's throat bobbed. When he spoke, he did so slowly, carefully. "Because I've been an asshole. Because I can."

Tim stared at him, wide-eyed and suddenly breathless.

Jason tore his eyes from the screen to look down at fingernails, inspecting them as if unsure what else to do with himself. He shrugged. "Because I've…I've done things…things I don't even know how to *begin* to make up for." He took a deep breath, the air trembling slightly on the exhale, and went quiet.

Tim swallowed thickly. His heart was beating like a drum against his ribs.

It felt like something was slowly starting to untangle itself in Tim's chest. Like a suffocating pressure had suddenly evaporated without him having realized it had been there to begin with. Like he could suddenly *breathe* without it feeling like a struggle.

"Oh."

Tim turned back to the TV. The words were ringing in his ears. The meaning behind them, the emotions, the pain. They all seemed genuine.

He thought back on pain tearing through his body. On how it felt to have his own Bo staff break his ribs. He remembered the terror, the fear, the pain. The knowledge that he might not make it out alive.

The glowing, green eyes.

His fingers gripped the fabric of his sweatpants. Of *Jason's* sweatpants. Tim looked down at them, almost in awe. He felt the warmth of the hoodie engulfing him, the food sinking into his stomach and spreading heat through his body. He thought of a hand on his chest, of quiet words of encouragement.

An apology, how vague it may have been.

You've got nothing to be sorry for.

It wasn't enough, not even nearly.

But maybe, it was a start.

Things I don't even know how to make up for.

"You know," Tim said, rolling the fabric of his sweatpants between his fingers, "my mom used to say that…offering a hot meal is the best way to make amends with someone."

In the corner of his eye, Tim saw Jason start. Tim kept his eyes on his lap, choosing his words carefully. "I mean. I guess, as someone who says they don't know *how* to, you know. Make amends or whatever...you're off to a good start."

Tim heard a sharp intake of breath, and after a few moments, turned to look.

Jason was staring at him, eyes wide, lips slightly parted in shock. His eyes were blindingly blue, shining wetly in the TV light.

There was not a trace of green, anger, or deceit.

Only surprise, hope, and to Tim's surprise, pain. And guilt.

Shame.

Jason was quick to look away, turning to his fingers again, a muscle in his jaw jumping. "I…" he swallowed, brow furrowing. His breath hitched, sounding too wet to be anything else than what it was.

For a moment, Tim thought Jason would leave it at that. Then—

"Thank you."

The words were quiet, almost inaudible even in the silence. But Tim heard them.

Something loosened even further in his chest.

Silence settled between them again, and remained for much longer than the previous ones. This time, however, it was more comfortable, less tension-filled as Jason seemed to be trying to compose himself, his breaths heavy and loud.

Then Jason cleared his throat, trying to be subtle when he rubbed at his eyes. “I totally lied though,” he said, sniffing again. “That isn’t the reason I'm being— why I let you stay.”

Tim glanced over at him, raising an eyebrow. “No?”

Jason shrugged, and the movement didn’t look half as nonchalant as he was probably hoping it did. “Nah. I just wasn’t gonna let a washed-up teen looking like something straight out of a Tim Burton movie—"

“Hey—”

“—roam the streets of Crime Alley at ass o’clock in the fucking morning.”

“That’s so uncalled for,” Tim said, fighting to keep the smile from his face.

“Really? The shadows make you look like a raccoon. When was the last time you slept? Ate?”

Seventy-two hours ago and I don’t remember, Tim’s brain offered uselessly. He opted for a weak shrug instead, swallowing his last mouthful of noodles. This was weird. It felt like he was being scolded. By the Red Hood. No...by *Jason Todd*.

Jason sighed and dragged a hand over his face. “Jesus, kid.”

“’m not a kid.”

“No? Then stop talking with your mouth full.”

The corner of Tim’s mouth twitched up. “You sound like Alfred.”

“Yeah, well, we have always been the voices of reason.”

“Voices of stupid more like,” Tim muttered under his breath, leaning

forward and placing the empty bowl on the table.

Jason's eyes narrowed. "Are you calling Alfred stupid?"

"No," Tim said, offering Jason a noodle-infested grin. "Just you."

"…I can make it look like an accident."

"Knowing you it would probably *be* an accident."

Jason tried hiding a huff of laughter behind a cough. It didn't go well.

Time passed and the program kept on playing. Minutes later and Tim's itching eyes began to close again. He didn't try to fight the pull this time as he lay down more on his side, his head propped up on a small pillow Jason had fetched from his room. He was just about to drift off Jason's voice suddenly pulled him back from the brink of sleep.

"I know you two are fighting and you probably want to keep this '*reap what you sow*' act going for as long as possible and all that..." Jason paused, then kicked Tim softly in the shin as if making sure he was listening. Tim offered a displeased grunt and Jason continued, "But you should probably call Bruce. He'll tear through all of Gotham when he realizes you're not at home."

Tim exhaled loudly, sinking further into the couch. "Later," he mumbled, voice heavy with sleep. Too tired to explain that that wasn't the case. That Bruce wouldn't go through the trouble of looking for him.

Jason? Undoubtedly. But Tim? Not likely.

There was a heavy sigh, and then some movement, but Tim already felt himself drifting off, sinking into unconsciousness. The feeling of something soft brushing his feet woke him enough to realize Jason was carefully draping a quilt over him, tucking it underneath his feet.

"Thank you," Tim murmured.

The prodding paused for a moment. Then it continued as Jason tucked the quilt around Tim's shoulders.

"Go to sleep, you idiot."

And Tim, who never really could ignore his Robin's orders, slept.

End Notes

not me with a novel-length WIP waiting to be written and deciding to instead rewrite the one-shot that's been sitting in my drafts folder for months. >:)

comments are so so so appreciated

thanks for reading!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!